

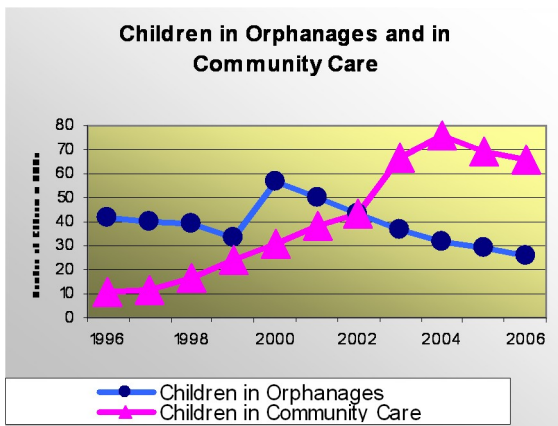


USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ROMANIA

Partnerships for Child Welfare: Closing Orphanages, Returning Children to Their Communities

The Challenge



Most people around the world will remember the horrific pictures coming out of Romanian orphanages in 1990. Children were tied to their cribs, rocking back and forth, silent from lack of attention and human contact.

The pro-natalist policies of the communist regime

outlawing family planning methods also authorized the state to raise all unwanted children. Misdirected economic measures in the late 1970's and 1980's created food and energy shortages and rampant poverty nationwide that contributed to the institutionalization of more

than 170,000 children. By the time of the revolution in 1989, there were more than 700 institutions across the country warehousing children from infants to young adults of 18. Orphanages were often located far away from population centers and inquiring eyes.

The status of disabled children was even more appalling. They were further segregated, placed in isolated rural institutions with little public scrutiny or decent medical care.

In 1990, the people of the world learned about the conditions inside these orphanages via

their television sets. Almost immediately, multilateral donors, churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from many countries, including volunteers from the U.S., came to Romania to help improve living conditions for these children. However, while the immediate international humanitarian aid helped improve conditions in orphanages, it took 17 years of sustained effort to improve the child welfare system in Romania.

The Response

In close cooperation with the Romanian Government and NGOs, the U.S. played a major role in improving the condition of Romania's abandoned children. U.S. Government assistance began with humanitarian aid to improve the health and condition of the children. Soon after programs worked to close orphanages and return children to their communities. American experts working in partnership with local NGOs and Romanian

authorities started to establish a new child welfare system centered on community- and family-based services as an alternative to the state-run warehouse system of orphanages.

Changes were made to laws to make these achievements possible. The aim was on decentralizing the child welfare system so that local counties could coordinate services for their citizens.

U.S. advisors helped

local NGOs and communities to become more involved in preventing child abandonment and changing large orphanages to smaller, more family-oriented units. Additionally, networks of foster families were created to care for non-disabled children and were trained to work with children with special needs.

The social work profession was re-created through the establishment of a university degree program, while

social attitudes were changed through anti-discrimination programs addressing the situation of citizens with physical and mental challenges.

The Special Olympics movement was developed in Romania and sustained with U.S. assistance to change public perceptions and provide opportunities and support to people with mental disabilities and their families.

The Results

U.S. assistance programs contributed to the following results:

- Less than 23,000 children are still in state-run institutions – down from 170,000 in 1990. Only 27 state-run child welfare institutions still host over 100 children each, down from 700 in 1990.
- Over 400 child welfare community-based services were created to replace state-run institutions. More than 65,000 children are using new community social welfare services – up from zero in 1990.
- More than 100 NGOs work in partnership with public child welfare authorities to create or expand existing child welfare services.
- Seven partnerships between NGOs, businesses and public child welfare authorities were created to identify life-long solutions for young people graduating from child welfare institutions.
- Thirteen child welfare service standards were legislated creating the basis for increased and consistent quality of care.
- A decentralized child welfare system is utilizing a USAID-developed Child Welfare Monitoring and Tracking Information System countrywide, providing the means for a more efficient use of resources.
- The National Federation of Social Workers developed professional and ethical standards to increase the quality of social services in Romania. Over 9,000 Romanian child welfare professionals were trained.
- Almost 1,000 Community Boards were created and are active in mobilizing local resources to prevent abandonment of children in their communities.
- A strong child welfare NGO federation, ProChild, was created. It is an important policy dialogue partner for the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights.
- Special Olympics in Romania is fully established as a national network of public and private institutions providing services for the disabled. Romania organized the first regional Special Olympics games with participants from 11 countries in November 2005. The program continues to grow and now over 20,000 Romanian Special Olympics athletes are involved in sporting events.
- Since October 2006, Romanian Ioana Ciobanu has been one of two European representatives of the Special Olympics Global Messengers forum that advocates for the worldwide Special Olympics movement.



Friendship Games, Constanta, 2005



Drawing Contest – “Discrimination against people with disabilities is unacceptable”



Special Olympics Athletes with the Romanian National Football Team



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